

## **Calisthenics Program Design for Beginners**

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

If you're a rank beginner to the fitness world, coming back to it, or just coming back from an injury, I recommend starting slow and working on a handful of simple holds and moves at first. The exercises I list below are all compound movements but they each emphasize certain muscle groups. Below are some simple compound moves that you can start with. By no means do you have to stick to only these exercises, especially if you're already into Yoga, gymnastics, or similar. Also, once you get used to these exercises, you can add at least one new training progression and/or a new training day each week. The idea behind this article isn't to get new trainees "stuck in a box" but to share some basics that each train multiple muscle groups, are easy to learn, and can help you put together "full body workouts".

Setting training goals -

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com/2013/10/08/setting-training-goals/>

More in-depth article about training programs -

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com/2014/03/18/workout-design-and-templates/>

### **Exercises**

Holds:

Bridges

Planks

Midsection holds

Shoulder holds such as downward facing dog, headstand, frog stand

Bottom of a deep squat

Moves:

Squats

Wall pushups, chair pushups

Sit in a chair and perform knee tucks

Or lie on your back for knee raises, or leg raises

Let Me Ins

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Gradually build your range of motion and your reps. You can split the exercises across different days depending on your goals and current level of stamina. I recommend starting each workout with a few minutes of cardio. Getting your heart rate up and a light bit of sweat is the goal. Then do some light stretching for the body parts you will train that day and joint circling for anything that feels stiff. Thirdly, practice at least two or three holds with an eye on form. Your moves should be done for 2 or 3 short sets each at first, and you'll gradually build reps.

Remember to balance the workout. For instance, work pushing muscles, then work pulling muscles, repeat, or do an explosive exercise then a deep stretch hold, for example. For holds you can build up to at least a minute each or perform them as moves for reps. (Such as bridge pushups or moving into different planks.)

### **Strength training sessions should be every other day for beginners**

On the other days, it's totally fine and actually encouraged to stay active! Do something that you enjoy - gardening, Zumba, what have you!

#### **Example day 1**

Cardio

Light stretching

Deep squat

Shoulder bridge or tabletop bridge

Let me ins or another pulling movement

Any pushup variation

Knee tucks or any other leg raise variation

Do some "cooldowns" at the end - deep stretching and breathing, joint circling, etc. I recommend practicing deep breathing exercises while in a "hold" (such as the bottom of a squat, or in a Yoga posture, for example)

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### **Example day 2**

Cardio

Light stretching (especially wrists, thighs, hamstrings, and ankles)

Shoulder holds or inversions (tripod, headstand, frog stand, etc.) - build up to 2 minutes total

Midsection holds - choose from six inches, candlestick, sitting in a chair and extending your feet (knees locked), and similar holds that you have the strength for

Planks

Squats

Add other lower body work once you have built up enough strength and range of motion in squats and bridges - do at least two other exercises - ideas include squat jumps, lunges, and duck walk to work the legs, also add in calf raises and short bridges as a move (aka bridge curls - with or without a chair).

Cooldowns

### **Example day 3**

Cardio

Light stretching

Hold a shoulder bridge or tabletop bridge for time, then deep hamstring stretch, repeat

Midsection holds - build up to at least 2 minutes total time each

Short bridge (aka glute bridge)

Planks - build up to at least 2 minutes total time each

Light stretching and joint circling for at least 1 minute

Knee tucks - build up to doing two short sets and two or three work sets

(Move on to leg raises and start with a lower number of sets again, once you're used to knee tucks.)

Cooldowns

A note about time: I don't mention how long to warm up or how long each workout should be because there are so many variables. Some days you'll need a longer, more gradual warmup. This is more true as we get older. Don't rush it - think of it as like cooking - it's a slow roast! The workout should be fairly brief, with bouts of intensity, but definitely long enough for your body to get the "training stimulus". More than 20-30 minutes for the exercises done for reps will usually be unnecessary if you're working hard enough. Still, focus on the intensity of the moves rather than how long you do them

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or how many reps you can do. The reps will come in time. Add a little here, a little there. Mainly focus on the quality of your exercises.

With this in mind, remember to take up to a 2 or 3 minute active rest between moves so you can refresh the muscles. I recommend stretching, or pacing your training area while joint circling, perhaps even get into a hold (such as a headstand or bridge) for up to a minute or so. Remember to practice deep breathing - this helps recover much faster, as well! As you improve, you can up the intensity by decreasing rest times and later add other intensity variables such as supersets, drop sets, slowmo training, burner sets (where you try to do all of your work sets for an exercise back to back), etc.

Also on the topic of quality, I recommend doing two brief warmup sets of a move before performing your "work sets" - such as doing some wall pushups or chair pushups before doing kneeling or full pushups. This helps you focus on the quality of the movements and it also has a neurological benefit for your work sets. (It has to do with "warming up" your mind and your neural pathways for what you're about to do- helps recruit more motor units, basically. Strength is a skill!!)

Don't worry too much about adding other exercises yet unless you're comfortable with any that work the same muscle groups as any of the exercises I've mentioned. In those cases, mix and match - find a good groove and remember to log your workouts so that you can chart progress. Write down what you're working on, any thoughts or comments (even if it's just how your emotional state was that day and how it helped or how you worked through it), your goals, and your sets / reps for moves and time for holds.

Also don't worry about more complicated training programs for a while. Try to master the basics first, and then make them harder by adding "tougheners". Once you've gained some experience, and you feel like moving beyond the basics to fancier exercises, I recommend moving on to gymnastics skills and/or more advanced progressive calisthenics movements and holds.

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My guide to functional strength has many articles on progressive calisthenics and some information about gymnastics. Articles include “cheat sheets” (which function as quick start guides and list “tougheners, etc.), more advanced moves and holds, links to YouTube video playlists, and more. Read the free PDF book by visiting the site’s homepage below and clicking on link on the top left of the site menu.

<http://strengthguidepdf.com>